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MOVING CEREMONY TO DEDICATE SUBMARINERS MEMORIAL AND HONOUR THEIR SERVICE

A moving ceremony to remember lost Australian submariners – including the dedication of a new Submariners' Memorial – and mark 50 years to the day of the commissioning of the HMAS Platypus submarine base has been held on Sydney Harbour.

The memorial honours the 42 submariners who died while serving as members of the Australian submarine force.

In delivering the keynote Platypus address at the ceremony, which took place on Friday, Vice Admiral Ian MacDougall AC AFSM RAN (retired) – a former Chief of Naval Staff who was the Executive Officer of HMAS Oxley, the first Australian Oberon-class submarine to berth at Platypus 50 years ago – paid tribute to those submariners who made the ultimate sacrifice.

“There is a measure of sadness that many who were here 50 years ago have passed away,” said Vice Admiral MacDougall. “In submarine parlance, they are still on patrol. They are not forgotten and are owed a debt of gratitude for building the foundations upon which the submarine force of today grew and will continue to do so.”

The Minister for Defence, Senator the Hon Marise Payne, said: “While the Future Submarines will provide sovereign capabilities beyond anything imagined when Platypus opened in 1967, they will continue in the same role the Oberon and Collins-class boats and their crews have filled for the past 50 years – a powerful instrument for deterring conflict and a potent weapon should conflict arise.”

The President of the Submarine Institute of Australia (SIA), Commodore Mark Sander (retired), said: “I was fortunate enough to spend the best part of two decades serving in submarines operating out of Platypus.

“Platypus was our home, a place synonymous with submariners.

“We remember the good times, but also remember those who lost their lives in submarines in the service of their country.”

Similar sentiments were expressed by the Deputy Chief of Navy, Rear Admiral Michael Noonan AM RAN, during the ceremony: “We come together to remember those who served and died in the service of our country while in the Submarine Service, especially Able Seaman Christopher Passlow, Able Seaman Hugh Markcrow and Seaman Damien Humphreys (who all died while serving in Oberon-class submarines).

“Each of these sailors demonstrated their readiness to serve their mates, their boat and their nation. It is their spirit of sacrifice and dedication that we honour and give thanks for, as individuals, as a community and as a nation.

“The memorial dedicated today will remind all Australians of their sacrifice.”

The memorial features the names of all six Oberon-class submarines, HMAS Oxley, HMAS Otway, HMAS Ovens, HMAS Onslow, HMAS Orion and HMAS Otama.

During the event proceedings, further recognition was given to Australia’s first submarine, HMAS AE1, which was lost without trace off the coast of Papua New Guinea in 1914, with all 35 crew members thought to have died. The search for this lost submarine continues today.

The Chairman of “Find AE1 Ltd”, Rear Admiral Peter Briggs AO CSC RAN (retired), said: “It is time Australia found its missing first submariners, honoured their service and brought closure to the descendent families.”

Another important theme at the event was the national commitment for the future of the Australian submarines force, built over the past 50 years on foundations laid by the commissioning of HMAS Platypus and the arrival of HMAS Oxley, which marked the genesis of Australia’s contemporary submarine capability.

“This day 50 years ago was a gala day with HMAS Platypus commissioning our first Oberon, HMAS Oxley, arriving after a 68-day passage from the UK,” Vice Admiral MacDougall said. “The commanding officer of Oxley, Lieutenant Commander David Lorrimer, drove the boat into Neutral Bay with great elan.”

Several members of Lieutenant Commander Lorrimer’s family were present at the ceremony.

The former HMAS Platypus site has been closed to the public for 15 years following the relocation of the submarine squadron to Western Australia and the site is now managed by the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust. With remediation of the site now complete, the trust is moving forward with plans to revive the site as a waterfront urban park.

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